



PROTECTING THE SAFETY AND HEALTH OF IMMIGRANT WORKERS

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

- There are approximately 16.5 million foreign-born workers in the United States.
- Latin America is the region of birth for over half of foreign-born workers.
- Foreign-born workers are more likely to be employed in the higher-risk and lower-wage sectors of the workforce, such as agriculture, construction, and service industries.
- Between 1999 and 2000, while the number of occupational fatalities in the country decreased, there was a 5% increase in the number of fatalities among foreign-born workers, and a 12% increase in the number of Hispanic-worker deaths (even though the Hispanic workforce grew by only 6%).

WHAT HAS NIOSH ACCOMPLISHED?

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is working to address the health and safety needs of immigrant workers through targeted efforts to reduce illnesses, injuries, and fatalities in the most hazardous sectors of the immigrant workforce.

Examples of program in action:

- To better understand issues faced by immigrant agricultural workers, NIOSH is collaborating with the Department of Labor to collect data on hired crop farm workers, most of whom are foreign born, through the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/01-19311.html>). NAWS is the only national study that has documented the living and working conditions of immigrant workers.
- In 2000, 23% of fatal occupational injuries to foreign-born workers occurred to workers in construction trades. NIOSH is studying dry wall work, the construction occupation that has the highest percentage of Hispanic workers, and has developed a Spanish survey and educational materials for preventing silicosis, a fatal disease affecting construction workers.
- In 2000, 24% of fatal occupational injuries to foreign-born workers were due to homicides. NIOSH is evaluating the effectiveness of violence prevention strategies, such as panic buttons in taxi cabs, as well as various state-based approaches. NIOSH also is supporting studies on prevention of nonfatal injuries to immigrant workers, such as home health care aides and poultry workers.
- NIOSH has developed a new Spanish-language web site to better meet the needs of the growing Hispanic worker population, which is estimated to increase by more than one third over the next decade. The web site, “NIOSH en Español (<http://www.cdc.gov/spanish/niosh/>),” provides resources in Spanish, including translations of selected NIOSH publications and links to other useful Spanish-language materials on occupational safety and health.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

NIOSH will continue to improve data collection, research, and communication methods to better address the many language, cultural, social, and political challenges immigrant workers face. Increased understanding of the experiences and concerns of immigrant workers will help us better tailor education and intervention programs to meet the needs of this diverse population.

For additional information on this and other NIOSH programs, visit www.cdc.gov/niosh.

May 2002

